The harmony of Virus; [edited by John Payne Collier].

PERCY SOCIETY.

HARMONY OF BIRDS.

THE

HARMONY OF BIRDS:

A Poem.

FROM THE ONLY KNOWN COPY, PRINTED BY JOHN WIGHT
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

WITH

AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES.

[by John Payne Collier]

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THE PERCY SOCIETY.

M.DCCC.XLIII.

INTRODUCTION.

THE ensuing tract has been attributed to John Skelton on the authority of Herbert, who was not aware of its existence until after he had published his edition of the "Typographical Antiquities" of Ames. He subsequently saw a copy of it in the hands of Latham, and from Latham it found its way into the library of the late Mr. Heber. Our re-impression is made from a transcript of that copy, for no other is known to be in existence.

Whether "A proper new Boke of the Armonye of Byrdes" were really the authorship of Skelton, is a point which we shall probably find considered and determined in the long promised, and, we hope we may now say, speedily forthcoming edition of that author's multifarious works, under the care of the Rev. Alexander Dyce. Herbert seems to have thought that this tract was "in the manner" of Skelton, but we own that it does not strike us at all in that light; it is of too moral

a turn, as well as in too modern a style, for his pen, however becoming its tendency might have been to his profession. Neither is the versification at all like that of any other production by Skelton with which we are acquainted. However, this is a point on which we do not feel well qualified to decide, and it is the less necessary that we should finally make up our mind upon the point, in as much as we are soon likely to have it decisively settled. It has never, that we are aware of, been attributed to any other author, and we are without any extrinsic evidence either way; none at least has come to our knowledge, beyond the fact that Wight was the printer of two of Skelton's admitted works, "Phillip Sparrow," and Colyn Clout." Both these are dateless, but purport to have been printed "by John Wight," and the last of them has the same imprint as the tract now offered to the members of the "Percy Society."

As to the date of the piece reprinted on the following pages, John Wight did not begin to print, as far as the fact can now be ascertained, until 1551, and books with his name attached to them, as a stationer, are extant dated 1588; but he appears to have left off printing on his own account early: "Ferrarius of a Common Weale," 4to. 1559, purports to have been printed, not by

John Wight, but "by John Kyngston, for John Wight," and he subsequently employed as his printers, Henry Denham, John Awdeley, Thomas Dawson, John Charlewood, Thomas East, Newton and Hatfield, Edward Bollifant, Henry Bynneman, &c. As "A proper new Boke of the Armonye of Byrdes" professes to have been printed not *for*, but *by* John Wight, we may fairly presume that it came from his press between 1551, when he began, and 1559 when he left off printing in his own name.

We believe that the poem is not only *unique* in itself, but *unique* in its kind, and on every account it deserves reprinting and preservation. Into whose hands it devolved on the dispersion of Mr. Heber's Library we are not informed, but before his death he gave us permission to copy it, with a view to a reimpression: his notion was, that the value of the original copy of a tract was not lessened by its being rendered accessible, but he was influenced, besides, by higher and better motives than mere pecuniary considerations.—We have good reason to know that he felt none of that literary dog-in-the-mangerism, which interferes with the employment by others of what the possessor cannot himself enjoy.

———

A

PROPER NEW BOKE

OF THE

ARMONYE OF BYRDES.

Imprinted at London by John Wyght dwelling in
Poules church yarde, at the sygne of
the Rose.

A PROPER NEW BOKE OF

THE ARMONY OF BYRDES.

WHAN Dame Flora,
In die aurora,
  Had coverd the meadow with flowers,
And all the fylde
Was over distylde
  With lusty Aprell showers;

For my disporte,
Me to conforte,
  Whan the day began to spring,
Foorth I went,
With a good intent
  To here the byrdes syng.

I was not past
Not a stones cast,
  So nygh as I could deme,
But I dyd se
A goodly tree
  Within an herbor grene;

Whereon dyd lyght
Byrdes as thycke
  As sterres in the skye,
Praisyng our Lorde
Without discorde,
  With goodly armony.

The popyngay
Than fyrst dyd say,
  Hoc didicit per me,
Emperour and kyng
Without lettyng
  Discite semper a me.

Therfore wyll I
The name magnify
  Of God above all names;
And fyrst begyn
In praisyng to him
  This song, Te Deum laudamus.

Then sang the avys
Called the mavys
  The trebble in ellamy,
That from the ground
Her notes round
  Were herde into the skye.

Than all the rest,
At her request,
  Both meane, basse, and tenur,

With her dyd respond
This glorious song,
  Te Dominum confitemur.

The partryge sayd,
It may not be denayd,
  But that I shall use my bath,
In flood and land,
In erth and sand,
  In hygh way and in path;

Than with the erth
Wyll I make merth,
  Accordyng to my nature.
She tuned then,
Te, eternum Patrem,
  Omnis terra veneratur.

Than sayd the pecocke,
All ye well wot
  I syng not musycall;
For my brest is decayd,
Yet I have, he sayd,
  Fethers angelicall.

He sang, Tibi
Omnes angeli,
  Tibi celi, he dyd reherse,
Et universi,
Bot estates on hye,
  And so concluded the verse.

Than sayd the nightyngale,
To make shorte tale,
  For wordes I do refuse,
Because my delyght,
Both day and nyght
  Is synging for to use:

Tibi cherubin
Et seraphin,
  Full goodly she dyd chaunt,
With notes merely
Incessabile
  Voce proclamant.

Than sang the thrusshe,
Sanctus, sanctus,
  Sanctus, with a solempne note,
In Latyn thus,
Dominus Deus,
  In Hebrew Sabaoth.

Than sayd the larke,
Bycause my parte
  Is upward to ascend,
And downe to rebound
Toward the ground,
  Singyng to discend;

Than after my wunt
Pleni sunt,
  Celi et terra, quod she,

Shall be my song
On briefe and long,
  Majestatis glorie tue.

The cocke dyd say,
I use alway
  To crow both fyrst and last:
Like a postle I am,
For I preche to man,
  And tell him the nyght is past.

I bring new tidynges
That the Kynge of all kynges
  In tactu profudit chorus:
Than sang he mellodius
Te gloriosus
  Apostolorum chorus.

Than sayd the pye,
I do prophecye,
  Than may I well syng thus,
Sub umbra alarum
Te prophetarum
  Laudabilis numerus.

Than the byrdes all
Domesticall,
  All at once dyd crye,
For mankyndes sake,
Both erly and late,
  We be all redy to dye.

Te martyrum,
Both all and sum,
They sang mellifluus,
Candidatus so bright,
One God of myght
Laudat exercitus.

Than the red brest
His tunes redrest,
And sayd now wyll I holde
With the churche, for there
Out of the ayere
I kepe me from the colde.

Te per orbem terrarum,
In usum Sarum,
He sange cum gloria;
Sancta was nexte,
And then the hole texte
Confitetur ecclesia.

Than the egle spake,
Ye know my estate,
That I am lorde and kyng;
Therfore wyll I
To the father only
Gyve laude and praisyng.

He toke his flyght
To the sonnes lyght,
Oculis aure verberatis;

Patrem, he sang,
That all the wood rang
  Immense majestatis.

Than sayd the phenix,
There is none such
  As I, but I alone;
Nor the Father, I prove,
Reygnyng above,
  Hath no mo sonnes but one.

With tunes mylde
I sang that chylde
  Venerandum verum;
And his name dyd reherse
In the ende of the verse,
  Et unicum filium.

Than sayd the dove,
Scripture doth prove,
  That from the deite
The Holy Spiright
On Christ dyd lyght
  In lykenesse of me;

And syth the Spiright
From heven bright
  Lyke unto me dyd come,
I wyll syng, quod she,
Sanctum quoque
  Paracletum Spiritum.

Than all in one voyce
They dyd all rejoyce,
  Omnes vos iste,
Chaungyng their key
From ut to rey,
  Et tu rex glorie Christe.

Then sayd the wren,
I am called the hen
  Of our Lady most cumly ;
Than of her Sun
My notes shall run,
  For the love of that Lady.

By tytle and ryght
The Son of myght,
  She dyd hym well dyscus,
Tu Patris syngyng,
Without any endyng,
  Sempiternus es filius.

The tyrtle trew,
With notes new,
  The lady of chastyte,
Of a vyrgins wombe
Was all her songe,
  And of mannes libertye ;

Tu ad liberandum,
Et salvandum
  Hominem perditum.

Non horruisti
Sed eligisti
  Virginis uterum.

Than sayd the pellycane,
Whan my byrdes be slayne
  With my bloude I them revyve;
Scrypture doth record
The same dyd our Lord,
  And rose from deth to lyve.

She sang, Tu devicto
Mortis aculeo,
  Ut Dominus dominorum,
Tu ascendisti
Et apparuisti
  Credentibus regna celorum.

The osyll dyd pricke
Her notes all thycke,
  With blacke ynke and with red;
And in like facyon
With Christ in his passyon,
  From the fote to the crown of the hed

But now he doth raygne
With his Father agayne,
  In dextera majestatis:
Than sang she with joye,
Tu ad dexteram Dei
  Sedes, in gloria Patris.

The swalowes syng swete,
To man we be mete,
  For with him we do buylde:
Lyke as from above
God, for mannes love,
  Was borne of mayden milde.

We come and go,
As Christ shall do,
  To judge both great and small:
They sang for this,
Judex crederis
  Esse venturus all.

Than in prostracion
They made oration
  To Christ that died upon the rood,
To have mercy on those
For whom he chose
  To shed his precious blood.

Te ergo quesumus,
We pray the Jesus,
  Famulos tuos subveni
Ab omni doloso,
Quos precioso
  Sanguine redemisti.

The haukes dyd syng,
Their belles dyd ryng,
  Thei said they came from the Tower:

We hold with the kyng,
And wyll for him syng
  To God, day, nyght, and hower.

The sparrowes dyd tell,
That Christ in his Gospell
  A texte of them dyd purpose;
Suis heredibus
Multis pastoribus
  Meliores estis vos.

They fell downe flat
With Salvum fac
  Populum tuum, Domine,
In heven to sit
Et benedic
  Hereditate tue.

Than all dyd respond,
Lorde, helpe at hond,
  Ne cadant ad internum;
Et rege eos,
Et extolle illos
  Usque in eternum.

They toke their flyght,
Prayeng for the ryght,
  And thus their prayer began;
Pater noster, qui es
Per singulos dies,
  Benedicimus te, God and man.

Et laudamus
Et gloriosus
  Nomen tuum so hye,
In seculum here,
In this militant quere,
  Et in seculum seculi.

They dyd begyn
To pray that syn
  Shuld clene from us exire;
Dignare Domine
Die isto sine
  Peccato nos custodire.

With supplication
They made intercessyon,
  And sung, Misere nostri,
Rehersyng this texte
In Englysh nexte,
  Lorde, on us have mercy.

Than dyd they prepare
Away for to fare,
  And all at once arose,
Singyng in ara,
Fiat misericordia tua,
  Domine, super nos.

With tunes renude
They dyd conclude
  Whan they away shuld flye,

To syng all and sum
Quemadmodum
  Speravimus in te.

Than dyd I go
Where I came fro,
  And ever I dyd pretend,
Not to tary long,
But of this song
  To make a fynall ende.

I sayd, In te, Domine,
Speravi cotidie,
  That I fall not in infernum ;
And than with thy grace,
After this place
  Non confunder in eternum.

FINIS.

Imprinted at London, by John Wyght dwelling in Poules church yarde, at the sygne of the Rose.

NOTES.

P. 4, l. 11,—*Without* LETTYNG] *i. e.* without *hindrance* or *obstruction.*

P. 4, l. 22,—*Called the* MAVIS] Sir W. Scott, in a note to his ballad of "Alice Brand," in The Lady of the Lake, informs us that the mavis is a thrush, but in this poem the thrush is afterwards mentioned as a different bird. Tyrwhitt in his notes upon Chaucer informs us that the mavis is Saxon for a thrush; but according to Todd, it is rather to be derived from the French *mauvis*, and he quotes a passage from Lord Bacon, which shews that he did not consider the mavis and the thrush the same bird.

P. 4. l. 21,—*The treble in* ELLAMY] *e la mi* seem to have been the names of musical notes in singing.

P. 5. l. 21,—*For my* BREST *is decayd*] The word "breast" was of old constantly used for voice.

P. 6, l. 11,—Incessabile] In the original this word is misprinted as two words, *In cessabile.*

P. 6, l. 25,—*Than after my wunt*] *i.e.* after my *wont*, or custom, so spelt for the sake of the rhyme.

P. 7, l. 2,—*On briefe and long*] Brief and long were the names of notes in music.

P. 8, l. 12,—*I kepe me from the colde*] Of all birds the robin is supposed most to prefer and resemble man, and his reason for "holding with the church," because it keeps him warm, is certainly a very human one.

P. 8, l. 14,—*In usum Sarum*] Missals *in usum Sarum*, were such as were employed at Salisbury.

P. 8, l. 24,—*Gyve* LAUDE *and praisyng*] Misprinted in the original "Gyve *luade*" &c.

P. 10, l. 5,—*From ut to rey*] *ut* and *re* were also the old names of musical notes in singing.

P. 10, l. 10,—*Than of her* SUN] Sun for *son:* it is rightly spelt in the next stanza.

P. 10, l. 17,—*Without any endying*] It is hardly worth notice, but in the original "Without" is misprinted *Witout.*

P. 11, l. 16,—*The osyll did pricke*] Shakespeare introduces "the oozel cock" in Midsummer's Night's Dream, Act iii. sc. 1. It differs from the blackbird chiefly by having a white crescent on its breast.

P. 11, l. 18,—*With black ynke and with red*] So of old musical notes were written and printed: to "prick," used two lines earlier, was a technical expression in the composition of music.

P. 12, l. 26,—*Their belles dyd ryng*] At the time when hawking was in fashion, hawks carried bells, that they might be heard, as well as seen.

P. 13, l. 11,— *Multis* PASTORIBUS] So in the original; the misprint is obvious. Vide Luke, c. xii. v. 7.

P. 14, l. 5,—*In this militant quere*] Formerly *quire* was not unfrequently spelt *quere*, especially if it were wanted for the sake of the rhyme.

P. 14, l. 15,—*And sung* MISERE *nostri*] Another misprint, which the reader will at once detect and correct.

P. 14, l. 20,—*Away for to* FARE] To fare in its oldest sense is to *go*, from *faran*, Sax. We still use it in the compound *thoroughfare*, if not in *farewell*.

P. 15, l. 6,—*And ever I did* PRETEND] Nothing was much more common of old, than to use "pretend" in the sense of *intend*.

THE END.

RICHARDS, PRINTER, ST. MARTIN'S LANE.